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SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2009

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: MDC DEFERS BOYCOTT DECISION, PARTY CONGRESS

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.5 b/d

1. (U) In a circular distributed to the diplomatic community on December 20, the MDC announced that it would defer until January a decision on whether to participate in the parliamentary elections scheduled for March. The missive reported that the party would continue to canvass its membership on the issue of election participation until early January. The party's National Council, its senior decision-making body, was expected to make a final decision on whether to participate later that month.

2. (SBU) MDC Secretary for Presidential Affairs Gandhi Mudzingwa confirmed to the Embassy on December 20 a report in the December 19 edition of the semi-independent Daily Mirror concerning the MDC's Party Congress. According to the article, MDC Secretary-General Welshman Ncube indicated that the party would postpone its National Congress until after the March elections if the party decided to participate in elections. Ncube added that if the party decided to boycott the election, it could proceed with the Party Congress in March after conducting the Women's and Youth Congresses in the preceding months.

3. (C) COMMENT: Many here, including within the opposition, have criticized the MDC's indecision over whether to participate in elections, but the party is damned if they do, damned if they don't. Announcing it will participate would confer some degree of legitimacy on the election climate in view of the party's oft-reiterated pledge that it would not participate until the playing field was leveled. Moreover, participation would raise an outcry among the many within the party and civil society who want a boycott. A boycott, however, would risk giving an election sweep to the ruling party, which could yet garner a sympathetic SADC's endorsement by portraying the boycott as unreasonably obstructionist. Such an outcome conceivably could consign the MDC to political oblivion. For now, a strategy of temporizing -- consulting with and preparing its membership for a decision and probing for possible concessions by the ruling party -- may be the best it can do.
DELL